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RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ASTANA 9964  
RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK 4368  
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 0223  
RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 0093  
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 0246  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 3952  
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 2220  
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0302  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0896  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0997  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L TASHKENT 000211

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SUBJECT: SANJAR UMAROV'S HEALTH REPORTEDLY DETERIORATING IN PRISON

REF: TASHKENT 167

Classified By: POLOFF R. FITZMAURICE FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (C) On February 14, poloff met with opposition Free Farmers Party leader Nigara Khidoyatova, who reported that the health of opposition Sunshine Coalition leader Sanjar Umarov continues to deteriorate in prison. Visibly upset, Khidoyatova began to cry and had difficulty speaking through part of the meeting. Umarov was imprisoned in March 2006 on politically-motivated charges of tax evasion and illegal commodities trading. Khidoyatova's sister Nodira, a cofounder of the Sunshine Coalition, was also convicted of the same charges in a separate trial in March 2006 and given a ten year sentence, which was later reduced to a suspended sentence (after she reportedly paid a very large "fine").

UMAROV'S SON VISITS FATHER IN PRISON, REPORTS HIS HEALTH IS WORSENING

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¶2. (C) Khidoyatova told poloff that she had spoken with Arslan Umarov, Sanjar Umarov's son, who had recently visited his father at prison number 64-47 in Navoi province. During the visit, which lasted approximately twenty minutes, Arslan was only allowed to speak to his father through a glass window. It was only the third time that family members were allowed to see Umarov since he was imprisoned. Arslan reported that his father appeared to be in much worse health than the last time he saw him in 2007, noting that his father appeared delirious and had large bruises on his face. Based on Arslan's information, Khidoyatova concluded that Sanjar Umarov had been tortured recently in prison. She was doubtful that authorities would amnesty Umarov, as he was not a human rights defender but a member of the political opposition. Instead, she feared that authorities intended for him to die in prison.

¶3. (C) Khidoyatova originally was going to bring Arslan

along to the meeting with poloff, but he reportedly decided against it at the last moment, fearing that he was being followed too closely by the National Security Service. Khidoyatova said that she would try to arrange another meeting for poloff with Arslan in a few weeks.

#### EZGULIK LEADER DENIED ACCESS TO UMAROV

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14. (C) Ezgulik Chairman Vasila Inoyatova reported being unable to visit Sanjar Umarov in prison on February 5 (reftel). Inoyatova traveled to the prison where Umarov is being held, but when she arrived, she was told by prison authorities that Umarov refused to meet with her or his lawyer, Rustam Rakhmatullaev, whom Ezgulik recently hired to defend him. Inoyatova demanded to hear this from Umarov in person, but she was eventually turned away by prison authorities. According to Khidoyatova, Umarov told his son Arslan that he was never informed by prison authorities of attempts by Inoyatova and Rakhmatullaev to visit him in prison, and said he was prepared to meet with them if prison authorities would allow it.

15. (C) Both Khidoyatova and Ezgulik have recently sent out press releases describing Umarov's plight. In addition, members of the Human Rights Alliance, which is largely funded by Khidoyatova, have held rallies the last few days outside of the General Prosecutor's Office in Tashkent demanding that Sanjar Umarov be released.

#### COMMENT

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16. (C) According to Inoyatova, who, along with a delegation of GOU officials, attended the UN Committee Against Torture (UNCAT) session on Uzbekistan last fall in Geneva along with a delegation of GOU officials, Uzbek Deputy Interior Minister Alisher Sharofutdinov directly referred to Sanjar Umarov during discussions with Committee members on the treatment of Uzbek prisoners. Reportedly, Sharofutdinov, who is viewed as a potential reformer by some human rights activists, stated that "Umarov and others" would be treated humanely. At the time, Inoyatova took Sharofutdinov's words to mean that Umarov might be amnestied and released in the near future. However, given his recent treatment in prison, we are increasingly doubtful that Umarov will be amnestied soon. We agree with Khidoyatova that Umarov is less likely to be amnestied than human rights activists because of his explicit political activity, which could be seen as more of a threat to the Karimov regime. Nevertheless, we will continue to press the Uzbeks to release Umarov (and other political prisoners) during our discussions with GOU officials, especially considering the apparent recent downturn in his health, and urge Washington interlocutors to deliver this message via the Uzbek Embassy as well.

NORLAND